DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 719 HE 026 375

AUTHOR Hollander, T. Edward
TITLE Can Collective Bargaining Help Institutions during a Period of Constrained Resources?
REPORT NO ISSN-0737-9285
PUB DATE Sep 92
NOTE 10p.; Based on a paper presented at the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions Conference (20th, April 13, 1992).
AVAILABLE FROM NCSCBHEP, Baruch College, 17 Lexington Ave, Box 322, New York, NY 10010 (single issue: $6.25; annual subscription: $25).
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Education and the Professions Newsletter; v20 n3 p1-6 Sep-Oct 1992

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Collective Bargaining; College Faculty; Economic Factors; Educational Finance; Faculty College Relationship; Financial Exigency; Government School Relationship; *Higher Education; *Public Colleges; Public Policy; *Resource Allocation; Retrenchment; State Aid

ABSTRACT

This article by T. Edward Hollander, offers an overview of the current condition of state funding for higher education, noting that unlike secondary and elementary education, higher education may appear to be a discretionary appropriation which state leaders can expand or reduce depending on the state's fiscal circumstances. Suggesting that college budgets will be seriously constrained in the near future and for the remainder of the century, the paper looks at measures that colleges can take to become more effective and efficient. The paper discusses various steps that colleges can take and argues that strong collective bargaining can be beneficial as it demands strong institutional leadership and effective institutional management. (JB)

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NEWSLETTER
NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE PROFESSIONS

Published by the School of Business and Public Administration
Bernard M. Baruch College • City University of New York • Vol. 20, No. 3 • Sept/Oct 1992

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T. Edward Hollander

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CAN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING HELP INSTITUTIONS DURING A PERIOD OF CONSTRAINED RESOURCES?

T. Edward Hollander

Editor's Note: Professor Hollander's research, as printed below, is based on a paper presented on April 13, 1992, at NCSCBHEP's Twentieth Annual Conference. This article deals with fiscal problems currently facing the academy including a discussion of ways that institutions of higher education have dealt with these cutbacks and an exploration of how collective bargaining may impede or assist this process. The views expressed herein are those of the author and not necessarily those of Rutgers University or of NCSCBHEP.

HIGHER EDUCATION VIEWED AS A DISCRETIONARY APPROPRIATION

A legislator recently commented that his state's higher education system served the state's need for a "rainy day fund." "When times are good," he commented, "we fund our higher education budget generously; when times are bad we dip into our informal 'reserve fund' to balance the state's budget."

States across the country have rediscovered that funding for higher education, unlike elementary and secondary, corrections, and other state mandated services, is a discretionary appropriation which state leaders can expand or reduce, depending on the state's fiscal circumstances. They have discovered too, that the short-term consequences of higher education budget reductions cannot be identified with sufficient precision to create either a political or educational crisis. One key member of a governor's staff suggested after two successive cuts in her state's higher education budget that she was still trimming fat. Her conclusion reflected the ease with which colleges and universities were able to absorb the reductions without a single layoff of any of the 10,000 full-time faculty members or the rejection of a single student. She asserted she would continue to recommend reductions until some adverse consequences were noted.

In state after state, the fiscal year 1991 budget base was reduced in mid-year in response to the shortfall in state revenues caused by the recession. A survey, conducted under the auspices of the State Higher Education Executive Officers' Association found that 90% of the states in the East suffered mid-year reductions averaging 3.1% in the fiscal year ended 1991.

Higher education fared even worse in the current fiscal year. While college and university boards in the "East" requested a 9.2% increase for their institutions for 1992, the states responded with even sharper reductions, lowering base budgets by 3.5%. Mid-year budget reductions were made in 22 states in the current fiscal year.

T. Edward Hollander is a professor at the Rutgers University, Graduate School of Management. He was formerly New Jersey Chancellor of Higher Education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Can Collective Bargaining Help Institutions During a Period of Constrained Resources?.... 1

Losing its Priority in the States: What Is Public Higher Education to Do?..... 6

NCSCBHEP COLLECTIVE BARGAINING CONFERENCE – APRIL 19-20, 1993

OUTLOOK AHEAD IS BLEAK

Four factors suggest a continuing bleak outlook, though I do believe that we tend to discount the future too heavily when times are bad and to be overly optimistic when times look good.

The economy has been relatively stagnant for several years, with opinion divided between optimists who at best project a slow growth and pessimists who believe we are at the edge of an economic precipice. But even the most optimistic among the members of that "dismal profession" whose life work is to avoid reaching a conclusion, foresee growth so slow that state revenues in pivotal eastern states will barely grow in relation to escalating mandated costs.

For this and other reasons, the states' ability to finance expanded budgets is tightly circumscribed by "taxpayer revolts" and higher priorities states now accord to elementary and secondary education, corrections, and health services. The attitude toward higher education in many states is downright hostile, reflecting a sense in many state houses that colleges and universities have neglected teaching in favor of research and have not responded adequately to statewide priorities for minority access, school improvement and other issues related to the perceived decline in America's competitive position.

The Federal outlook for higher education is somewhat better as Congress wrestles with the Reauthorization Act. Student aid and loan programs appear to have survived the "default" problem. Congress has traditionally supported higher education programs and is likely to continue to do so. The administration is another matter. While "presidential election politics" has temporarily sidetracked interest in the expanding federal deficit, it is clear that the deficit is continuing to increase. It is likely to expand faster in future years with "no new taxes" proposed by the Republicans and increasing health care costs a certainty under a Democratic administration. A future administration will have to deal with unbalanced budgets through the end of this century while many federal programs continue to spin out of control. Reliance on a new expanded federal role for financing higher education would be foolhardy. The odds for a continuing effort at the current level, however are good.

Rising tuition revenues, especially in the public sector, have been used to offset state budget reductions in many states, especially in the "East." However, price resistance is growing and will limit tuition increases as a compensating source of revenues in both the public and private sectors. Several states have restricted the ability of public institutions to raise tuition. Public institutions cannot count on continuing a rate of increase in tuition much beyond changes in the price level.

In summary, the poor economy, changing state priorities, federal budgetary problems and the resistance to high levels of tuition will seriously constrain college budgets for the near-term and very likely through the remainder of the century.

CAN COLLEGES HELP THEMSELVES?

Increasingly, the question is being raised on campuses and in the state houses, "Can colleges help themselves?" "Can they become more effective?" "Can they become more efficient?"

One would think that the sharp budget reductions imposed on colleges and universities would lead directly to a fundamental reappraisal about priorities, administrative costs and the potential for productivity gains. Nothing focuses the mind so effectively as the fear of institutional death or radical surgery.

The first responses to budget reductions were predictable. Most colleges that experienced across-the-board state reductions followed the state's example. They allocated budget reductions across the board, after first passing as much of the burden onto the students as they reasonably could. The first victims of budget reductions were the long-suffering maintenance departments whose staffs are both powerless and invisible. Extending the backlog of deferred maintenance is not only traditional, but almost compelling. When it became necessary to reduce employment, the layoffs were distributed among the least powerful groups on campus, the mid-level administrative staffs, the secretarial staffs and the adjunct faculty.

The initial blows fell upon those expenditures most easily reduced from a political perspective. Issues of productivity, priority, improved efficiency, institutional mission, and the possibility of continuing budget reductions were barely discussed. In all fairness to our campuses, the first reductions were unexpected and sudden. There was no time for planning.

The second round of reductions has stimulated research, recruitment of consultants and interest in long-term solutions. More and more members of the academic community have come to recognize that there may have been a fundamental shift in the funding prospects for higher education, requiring institutions to

reframe the problem in terms of fundamental questions of structure and purpose.

The first major effort in this area has occurred in Oregon, where the state system faces reductions of 30% over the next five years. With strong and effective leadership, the university system has responded to impending disaster with two initiatives. First, the system is reevaluating its administrative structure and systems in an effort to improve services, prune needless layers of structure, and reduce the administrative work force. Their goal is to reduce costs, yet improve service by streamlining and decentralizing. Their second response is more controversial. They determined that they would not reduce academic services across-the-board or in relationship to the proportion of non-tenured to tenured faculty. Instead they determined to strengthen and enhance their highest priority and strongest programs and eliminate the rest to the extent necessary to meet their expected budgetary levels. Their reasoning is that the system cannot survive a general weakening but it can lop off what is not essential without destroying the morale or effectiveness of the remainder. Whether they can achieve the high level of savings required at an acceptable level of conflict remains to be demonstrated.

The remainder of this decade is not likely to be business as usual. Dealing with fiscal constraint long-term requires a strategy that permits continuing educational improvements while controlling expenditures. The simultaneous accomplishment of both is only possible through increases in productivity and improvements in management efficiency. .

AMPLE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Colleges and universities have ample room for improvement. Recent studies have documented the rapid increase in academic and administrative expenditures for higher education, 2.5%-3% beyond inflation. Administrative costs rose a whopping 60% during the past decade. Faculty salaries rose in real terms and teaching loads continued to decrease. These changes occurred during a period of relatively stable enrollments. In part, they were a response to generous public financing. In part, they compensated for the perceived underfunding during the 1970's.

SAVING MONEY AND STRENGTHENING RESOURCES

The following are four major possibilities which I suggest for strengthening educational programs during a period of limited resources.

A. Build the Institution's Future Around Areas of Strength: Establish, Achieve Agreement on and Communicate Clear-Cut Goals for the Institution

This requires strong effective institutional leadership that can set a vision for the institution, set realistic goals, set priorities in relation to the goals and plan strategically for their realization. Once these agreements are reached, the institution needs to prune away academic and administrative programs that are inconsistent with the long-term goals of the institution.

B. Streamline the Administration

Reexamine the basic organizational structure of the institution in relation to its goals, eliminating low priority administrative functions, reducing levels of reporting, treating faculty and students as constituents to be served and not constituents to be controlled, and establishing an on-going mechanism for monitoring administrative performance. Establish and meet a standard for state-of-the-art systems for admission, registration, payment of fees and other student services.

C. Force Decision-Making and Budgetary Responsibilities Downward into the Departments

Strengthen departmental chairpersons' ability to manage by providing them with budgetary flexibility, permitting departments to reallocate savings for continuing improvements. Use the budget both as a spending constraint and to provide teaching and research options for faculty members.

D. Reexamine Fundamental Educational Assumptions

Other commentators have suggested that one area of waste on campus is in the entrepreneurial role of the faculty member, who, alone among employees in our society, sets his or her own workload, priorities and time commitments. I believe the freedom afforded faculty members to allocate their own time is essential to the educational process. Yet we need to reexamine whether we use faculty time effectively and efficiently. I am not just talking about teaching load and class size, but also about the waste of faculty time in administrative tasks and at badly planned meetings, the length of the calendar, the continuing almost exclusive reliance on the lecture method, the maintenance of highly specialized, low enrollment courses in the curricula, and the continuing expansion into new programs without eliminating existing low enrollment programs.

Most fundamentally of all, we need to strengthen the management function in higher education. Institutional management has been a low priority in higher education. Some have even labeled the term an "oxymoron." Indeed it may be. College leadership in the public sector has been traditionally weak. It is not that the weak aspire to leadership, though some have suggested that the selection process itself serves to eliminate strong candidates. A more rational, a certainly more acceptable explanation, derives from the nature of the institution which emphasizes entrepreneurial qualities, participative decision-making, strong protective security arrangements for faculty members, and the capacity of faculty for endless debate of even the most trivial questions. Academic administration relies heavily upon collegiality for its decision-making processes. Departmental chairpersons, the first line of authority, are essentially "firsts" among equals, lacking both the tools and the incentives to manage.

In the public sector, the state, itself, weakens institutional management. Northeastern states are notorious for their intrusiveness into the management process, relegating many institutional heads to a "mediative role" between the state agencies and the institution. The state provides no incentives for improvement. State funding criteria are indifferent to management effectiveness and efficiency. State incentives do not encourage strong management positions. In fact, the state plays a counterproductive role encouraging institutional dependence, "buck passing," and issues to "float up" from the campuses to the highest levels of state government where the decision is often made by a low-level budget examiner. No wonder, then, that one researcher found that the most successful college president, that is, the one who survives the longest, plays a reactive rather than a leadership role.

The times are likely to require strong not weak leadership and aggressive presidents who are willing to make difficult choices among competing priorities and programs. Strong leadership is required to redefine workload, shift the balance between research and teaching, control administrative costs, return the college to a service function with the principal constituencies defined as both students and faculty members.

Not everyone will agree with the assumption that the future outlook is that bleak or the conclusion that strong and effective management is imperative for dealing with fiscal constraint. I leave the suggestion of alternatives to those with a more optimistic bent.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Will collective bargaining strengthen or detract from the ability of institutions to confront a more demanding public less generous with its resources?

Strong institutional leadership is consistent with collective bargaining. A strong collective bargaining agent requires strong and effective institutional management. The institutional response to effective union representation is to build countervailing power. Weak leadership is rapidly unmasked in the collective bargaining process, and an accommodating president is not likely to be tolerated by an institutional governing board. The nature of the process is centralizing, causing a transfer of power on the campus from the departmental level upwards into the central administration. Collective bargaining brings with it disadvantages of centralization and advantages of strong central management leadership.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND INSTITUTIONAL RETRENCHMENT

Collective bargaining can be useful in providing for an orderly process of retrenchment should that prove necessary. A well-defined and acceptable retrenchment process validates presidential action when it is needed and provides a vehicle for faculty participation in a process largely dependent upon faculty cooperation. Whether the process is defined in the university's policies or in its collective bargaining agreement, its development is likely to be a shared effort of the bargaining agent and the institution's management.

Strong institutional leadership can be allied with strong union leadership if both parties share common interests for personal and institutional survival against a common external enemy. The alliance, at least in theory, can be continued to confront difficult internal choices. While one would not expect the faculty representatives to participate actively in making budget cuts, their acceptance of management's responsibility to do its job honestly and well will be helpful in dealing with constraint. I would conclude, therefore, that collective bargaining is both consistent with and supportive of strong institutional management, the kind needed in the remaining decade of this century.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND CHANGES IN EDUCATIONAL MISSION

Collective bargaining can limit significantly the options available to an institution when budgets are cut.

If the union's primary responsibility is to protect the interests of its active membership, it may not be able to fulfill that primary responsibility while participating or accepting a program designed to improve overall productivity and institutional efficiency.

For one thing, the faculty union may be far more powerful than representatives of other constituencies on campus. Full-time faculty jobs may be preserved while adjunct, secretarial, administrative and maintenance jobs are abolished. If that approach is educationally sound, well and good. If not, an unbalanced retrenchment may be inconsistent with the long-term interests of the faculty, students and the institution. The elimination of programs and services inconsistent with the mission of the institution or which are low in priority compared with other programs may conflict with the needs of the faculty represented in collective bargaining. Permitting deferral of maintenance or of capital projects may make an institution less competitive, but these management priorities are not likely to be those of the institution, when times get tough.

Can collective bargaining play a constructive role in achieving gains in productivity and effectiveness in the academic function? If one accepts the premise of the Oregon model that institutions should contract around areas of their strength, will collective bargaining facilitate elimination of low priority programs that result in layoffs of tenured faculty members while protecting non-tenured faculty members in high priority programs? Can unions support workload increases, if they are necessary? Can they accept incentive systems that seek to achieve efficiencies? Can they support such reforms as better accountability, more effective expenditure control, and increased assessment, reforms that are increasingly demanded of the academic community?

Whether they do so or not is important to the comfort level of the administration, but not necessarily to the implementation of these programs. Not all institutional issues are susceptible to collective bargaining. The responsibility for effective management falls on the board and its appointed executive officers. They need to do their job, even when it is painful and unpopular. The collective bargaining process cannot bear the weight of responsibility for the managemen: of an institution. College presidents are not members of the bargaining units. They should not expect bargaining units to do their work. Presidents who want only to be loved need to find some other line of work. Their role on the college campus requires that they earn their keep though that may require adversarial relationships with those persons chosen to represent faculty interests. Maintaining a balance among institutional interests and in the competition for resources in the future may require less participative democracy and more effective decision-making among institutional leaders.

Finally, it should be said that faculty representatives have often taken positions in support of institutional interests even when such positions were not popular on campus. They often have pressed for better management and educational reform before it was popular to do so. They have insisted on orderly processes for retrenchment before the topic was a priority for governing boards. And they often have cooperated in painful and difficulty campus decisions when institutional survival is at stake.

The role of collective bargaining when resources are scarce will be defined differently depending upon the history of collective bargaining, the nature of presidential leadership and the degree of pain experienced on the campus. It also depends upon whom the union represents. If the union represents a cross-section of the faculty who give it active support, the union's interests will tend to coincide with the broadest faculty interest. If the union activists are drawn from a more limited group with their own particular agenda, there is likely to be greater divergence between the faculty interests expressed through the union and the interests of the broader constituency. Institutions may do well to encourage the broadest possible membership in unions on campuses where collective bargaining is an established institution.

CONCLUSIONS

The future outlook for financing higher education is bleak, especially in the eastern states that are in transition to a relatively weaker economy. Institutions that can manage effectively during the next decade will take advantage of the times to rethink their budgets and programs. They will emerge stronger at the expense of other institutions.

Collective bargaining can be an ally or obstacle to the changes needed during the next decade. College administrators should take full advantage of the opportunities for effective working relationships with the union leadership. Such relationships will facilitate maximum faculty support for whatever course of action the times may require. Good working relationships during painful times will require a high degree of statesmanship on the part of all parties.

Administrators need to accept greater responsibility for leadership and setting the institution's future course in relation to public needs for higher education and the needs of all of the constituencies the institution serves. Circumstances will often require that the college leadership understand but reject the position of the bargaining agent when its interests are at variance with the policies of the governing board. The boundaries that separate management and labor are likely to emerge more sharply defined at the end of this decade, and that may well be a step in the right direction. Collective bargaining cannot bear all of the burdens of institutional management.

LOSING ITS PRIORITY IN THE STATES: WHAT IS PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION TO DO?

Frederick S. Lane

Editor's Note: Professor Lane's research is presented in the following which is a revised version of his article which appeared in New York Teacher, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1 (September 7, 1992), a publication of the New York State United Teachers, AFT, AFL-CIO. The views expressed herein are those of the author and not necessarily those of Baruch College or of NCSCBHEP.

We're losing it. Actually, higher education has lost whatever priority in public policy it once enjoyed. And, the implications for collective bargaining in higher education are vast.

In all this, it seems hard for those of us in higher education to understand what is happening around us, exactly why -- almost no matter where we teach, in New York or elsewhere -- higher education these days "don't get no respect."

In the end, it is not so difficult to understand higher education's predicament today. Even though the federal government is an important source of support for aid to students as well as research, and local governments in many states support community colleges, higher education is primarily a state-level function in this nation's federal system of government.

The states are in real fiscal trouble for three principal reasons: an explosion in demands for services, a weak economy, and a decline in support from the federal government. With the Reagan and Bush Administrations' quiescence, demands on the states for new and expanded public programs have increased. Health care, human services, and criminal justice are examples. In addition, the 1980's brought a different mix of public issues, including the homeless, drugs, immigration, and AIDS.

These resulted in tax increases in most states and an increase in state spending. The addition of a weak economy brought recessionary revenue shortfalls as well as structural deficits. Pressures against still more tax increases have grown. Quite naturally, state governments have been forced to brake for the recession.

Federal cutbacks and mandates are part of the problem in nearly every state. Not counting federal aid to families with dependent children and the federally-mandated medicaid program, federal government assistance to the states fell by about a third in the decade of the 1980's.

Higher education's share of state allocations since 1979 has gone down; appropriations per full-time equivalent student also went down, then staged a brief recovery in the mid-1980's, and has been declining ever since. In the 33 years that experts at Illinois State University have been tracking state appropriations to higher education, fiscal year 1992 marked the first time that state governments as a whole appropriated less for higher education than they had the previous year.

Tuition per FTE student in public higher education increased dramatically in the 1980's, producing costs higher than the average family felt it could afford. Like tax increases, pressures against tuition hikes have increased; a recent example is that the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on

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Children, Youth, and Families has started an investigation of college costs, especially at public institutions.

In all this, higher education is seeing more students, but has less money to spend on them. There is some recognition of this. Recently Newsweek polled state governors regarding the "most serious unmet needs" in their states due to budget problems. Of the 11 items listed, only health care and social services exceeded the 41 percent of respondents indicating higher education as an area of unmet need.

Further support for this view is seen in New York State. After long neglecting higher education, last year the Business Council stated, "The state's higher education system now seems likely to fall short of the capacity it needs to handle the state's future needs for education prospects for the growing number of high-skill jobs and professions." And in April, 1992, the New York Times noted that "reductions imposed on public universities now cut so close to the bone that it's becoming impossible to ask them simply to take the pain...the public has to stop pretending that it can maintain quality higher education without paying the price."

Higher education is further stymied in reversing its adverse environment in the states for a number of reasons unique to this particular public policy arena:

- the strong strain of anti-intellectualism in American life;
- the clash in perspectives between academicians and public officials, exacerbated by years of academic condescension;
- concern about the increasing length of time undergraduates take to graduate and about the decline in college completion rates during the 1980's;
- some unhappiness with the skills of college graduates and resulting concerns about the quality of instruction and the need for assessment;
- the unemployment and underemployment of some college graduates;

- perceived institutional inefficiency and questionable financial practices (like Stanford's over-billing the federal government);
- a decline in public confidence in the leaders of higher educational institutions;
- a failure to deal openly with its publics, including the disclosure of data about crime on campus and graduation rates;
- goal proliferation at almost all kinds of institutions, from community colleges to research universities, and the need for a focussed mission at any particular institution;
- competition among institutions and systems and sectors of institutions -- public, independent, and proprietary;
- sexism and racism on the part of public officials as the percentage of women and individuals from diverse racial and ethnic groups enrolling in higher education grows;
- the common absence of statewide policy direction and coordination in higher education.

University bashing seems commonplace -- from Carolyn Bird's The Case Against College, a 1975 warning we didn't need, to Richard M. Huber's How Professors Play Cat Guarding the Cream and Martin Anderson's Imposters in the Temple, both published in 1992.

In the 1960's, higher education had at least one politically salient issue it could count on: expanding public colleges and universities in response to pressures for dramatic increases in enrollment. For example, in the five year period at the end of the 1960's and very beginning of the 1970's, on average we opened a new college a week in this country.

To show you how bad things have gotten today, the clearest examples are from California and Florida. In both states, the number of high school graduates is projected to increase by over 60 percent during the 20-year period beginning 1986. The resulting need for timely expansion of the California and Florida public college and university systems is great, yet they have simply been politically unable to do this. Confronting this academic year's budget cuts, California State University Chancellor Barry Munitz was forced to threaten to mothball the new San Marcos campus (in northern San Diego county), the only new campus California has yet to open in recent years.

For those anticipating some help from Washington in a pro-education Clinton Administration, the main federal emphases are likely to be Head Start, elementary-secondary education, and apprenticeships -- not higher education. In higher education, initial attention is expected to be given to schemes helping students to pay for an undergraduate education and the related notion of national service.

What can we do about the future of higher education in the states? The situation is certainly a difficult one.

Let me start with two suggestions: First, reclaim the trust of citizens and public officials in higher education by responding to the barrage of criticism, making the necessary changes in our institutions, and improving both our efficiency and effectiveness. There is room here for all of us to be directly involved: boards and administrators, faculty and unions, staff and students, alumni and public representatives.

Second, colleges and universities need to develop a cohesive, forceful constituency for higher education. Even when policymakers understand the policy problems in higher education, they rarely feel the intense pressures from interest groups normally necessary to translate solutions into policy actions.

These two approaches are related: Only when they are implemented can you expect to enlist the support of governors and legislative leaders, other opinion leaders and a broad group of citizens to promote higher education. Only then can you be prepared to deal with the next two or three years of fiscal austerity and plan for a future with a stronger economy and healthier state budgets.

Higher education has never been more important to our nation's future: its economic competitiveness, our social vitality, and the quality of life. American higher education is still widely viewed as the world's finest system; failure to respond to current state-level policy pressures invites serious problems for our colleges and universities and for our nation.

NATIONAL CENTER NEWSLETTER

A publication of the National Center issued four times during the year. Annual subscription rate: $25; Single copy, $6.25; free to Center members. Back issues available. ISSN 0737-9285

Editor and Administrative Director: Beth H. Johnson

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